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UNCLAS OTTAWA 001744

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EB AND WHA
USDA FOR LINDA DETWILIER
APP WINNIPEG SENDS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [OTRA](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: MANITOBA CONSERVATION LEADER REGISTERS CONCERN IN
BSE CRISIS

1. On 19 June, Manitoba Conservative Party leader (and head of Manitoba's Official Opposition in the Legislature) Stuart Murray visited new APP Winnipeg Consul to formally register the concerns of his constituents at the ongoing freeze of Canadian beef import into the United States. He specifically asked if there was anything else that political leaders or beef producers could do to speed the reopening of the border. Further, noting that some U.S. Senators had suggested reopening the border to Canadian beef could take as long as seven years, Murray asked if Consul had any indication as to how long the process might really take or if he saw any light at the end of the tunnel.

2. Consul responded that while he was quite new to Canada and to the office, his initial impression was that the Canadian government was being quite cooperative and thorough in its investigation of the Alberta outbreak. He underscored that the USG's responsibility first and foremost was the protection of U.S. consumers, but that the U.S. also understood the pain inflicted on Canadian ranchers. Consul said that the U.S. would do everything it could to reopen the border to Canadian beef as quickly as possible, but added that any such decision must be based on sound science. He pointed out that the task -- proving the existence of a negative -- was logically impossible, but that the U.S. would have to have a high confidence level in the science before acting.

3. Murray asserted his belief that there was some political angle to the continuing ban. Pointing both to the obvious benefits to the U.S. cattle industry of the border closure to the U.S. beef, as well as the recent decline in U.S.-Canadian relations and what he described as the poor relationship between PM Chretien and President Bush, Murray said the purpose of his call was to send the message that Manitoba's political leaders wanted to see the situation resolved quickly. Consul agreed to report his views to Ottawa and Washington, and provided Murray with an June 6 backgrounder from USDA on BSE. Consul also offered to keep Murray informed of any new developments he became aware of.

4. COMMENT: It is worth noting that under Murray's leadership, the Conservative party lost 4 of its 24 seats in the legislature in the June 3 provincial elections, and local press reports suggest Murray may face a leadership challenge in the next few months. While Murray's concern for Manitoba farmers is real and justified, his approach to APP Winnipeg may also represent his desire to show himself as a man of action. End Comment.
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